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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY ENGAGES MEXICAN LEGISLATORS ON
MERIDA INITIATIVE

MEXICO 00006042 001.2 OF 002

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Summary: At an October 29 dinner with senior members of Mexico's congress, Deputy Secretary had the opportunity to address some of the issues raised both in the U.S. and Mexico regarding the announced Merida Initiative. While members of the three principal parties in both chambers indicated some concerns with the way the Merida Initiative has been handled by the GOM to date, none registered serious objections to the substance of the program; each agreed that circumstances in Mexico warranted stronger law enforcement cooperation. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Late business in the Chamber of Deputies kept all but one lower house invitee from attending the dinner (PRI deputy Juan Manuel Paras Gonzales). However, all three of the principal Senate power brokers attended, including Senate President Santiago Creel (PAN), Political Coordinator Manlio Fabio Beltrones (PRI) and PRD leader Carlos Navarrete. Former Foreign Minister and current Senate Foreign Affairs Commission President Rosario Green (PRI) and North America Commission head Senator Ricardo Garcia Cervantes (PAN) also participated. Ambassador Negroponte was accompanied by Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon, Ambassador Garza, Deputy Chief of Mission Leslie Basset, Embassy Political Counselor and the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section Chief.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) The group took pains to outline the party composition of both chambers for the benefit of the Deputy Secretary, stressing the strength Congress has gained in

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recent years. It is a key institutional player in Mexican politics. Both chambers are more self-confident and assertive than in years past; the agenda during this current legislature is particularly ambitious. This narrative served to drive home the point that Mexico's Congress is an institution that expects to be taken seriously and play a significant role in shaping policy in areas such as security and law enforcement.

[¶4.](#) (SBU) Senator Green pointedly asked the Deputy Secretary why the unveiling of the Merida Initiative had been

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&so badly managed,8 asserting that US-GOM consultations had been conducted secretly and that legislators, at least in Mexico, felt blind-sided by the October 22 announcement. While others at the table, PAN legislators in particular, opined that Senator Green might be overstating her case, they too agreed that the GOM had to do a better job consulting Congress as the program moves forward (while granting that Congress here has no real statutory or budgetary authority over the initiative). The Senate leaders contrasted U.S. outreach to the U.S. congress favorably with GOM,s own &meager8 efforts, noting that the information they had on the initiative,s key elements came from the U.S.

15. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary advised that the U.S. administration had faced its own criticism in Congress for not having consulted fully enough in advance of announcing the initiative. Such criticism, he said, was part and parcel of executive-legislative relations, as well as the need for the two governments to develop a proposal that could be advanced for consideration. He stressed that the initiative was the result of the strong personal commitment of presidents Bush and Calderon when they met in March. He assured his interlocutors that the October 22 announcement was only the beginning of a dialogue among relevant players in both Mexico and the U.S.

16. (SBU) Process concerns aside, dinner participants agreed that the security situation in Mexico is grave, that both countries bear responsibility for confronting narcotics trafficking and related criminality, and that the Merida Initiative represents a logical step in the effort to strengthen the relationship. Even PRD,s Carlos Navarette, whose party is sharply critical of the U.S. on many fronts agreed he recognizes the need for a strengthened law enforcement partnership between the U.S. and Mexico. Embassy Comment: Navarette is considered to be a PRD moderate and is well regarded by many in the GOM for his flexibility. His comments reflected what other PRD moderates have told us. Private words aside, however, Navarette and other PRD legislators can be expected to mount public criticism of the

MEXICO 00006042 002.2 OF 002

package as it moves forward. End Comment.

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